



Caromex International is making headlines with help from the SBA:

“Local wax maker makes connections, wins state award”

FORT MILL TOWNSHIP -- Conversations frequently flit between English and Spanish at Caromex International.

The small office off Carowinds Boulevard is abuzz these days connecting oil refineries in the U.S. with candle makers in Mexico and cosmetics manufacturers in Spain.

"Wax is a byproduct of refining," Christine Montés explains.

Christine started Caromex in 2001 as an importer/exporter. Her husband José joined Christine at Caromex, and the couple transformed the business into the buying and selling of industrial quantities of wax.

José's grandfather started a candle factory in Mexico in the late 1940s, and José learned the wax business from his father. After college, José went back to help his family run the factory. He has used the connections he developed there open doors for Caromex in more than 15 countries.

The Small Business Administration awarded Caromex the title of 2006 S.C. Small Business Exporter of the Year.

The Montés are mum on just how much business the company did last year, but Dan Holt with the SBA said it's quite a bit. He said over the last few years the Montes have brought in millions of dollars from abroad.

Caromex doesn't keep a wax inventory. It's a fairly quick business. A refiner in Texas has an excess quantity of wax left from making gasoline. He calls Caromex looking for someone to take it, and at the same time a candle maker in Mexico calls looking to buy a load of wax. It is up to Christine and her staff to work out a price and see that the right amount gets sent to the right place.

"Wax is one of those things you don't really think about, but it's in a lot [of products]," Christine said. In fact, Caromex has sold wax for candles, hot melt adhesives (used for sealing boxes), PVC lubricants, cosmetics, chewing gum, carton coatings and polishes, among other things.

Like every global market, the wax market felt the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita last year. Several refineries in the Gulf Coast were shut down for extended periods, leading to a reduced supply of wax on the market. Caromex helped connect other wax sources with clients who had depended on the Gulf Coast refineries, ensuring that those clients could stay in business.

Three years ago it was just Christine full time and José on the weekends. Now both work full time along with a staff of two other full-time employees and a part-time employee. Christine wants to add up to three more sales people.

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The Montés first met Dan Holt, SBA International Finance Specialist, two years ago. In 2005, Dan invited them to take part in an eight week export training program at Winthrop University. As part of the networking process, he also introduced them to an aid insurance agent who arranged for a foreign account credit insurance policy. In follow-up visits, Dan assisted the Montés in finding a bank to finance Caromex with a \$1 million revolving line of credit, which was backed by an SBA loan guaranty. Most recently, he helped Caromex to procure a paid consultant from the minority small business unit of the U.S. Department of Commerce to assist transforming the company from a "mom and pop" to a major international entity.